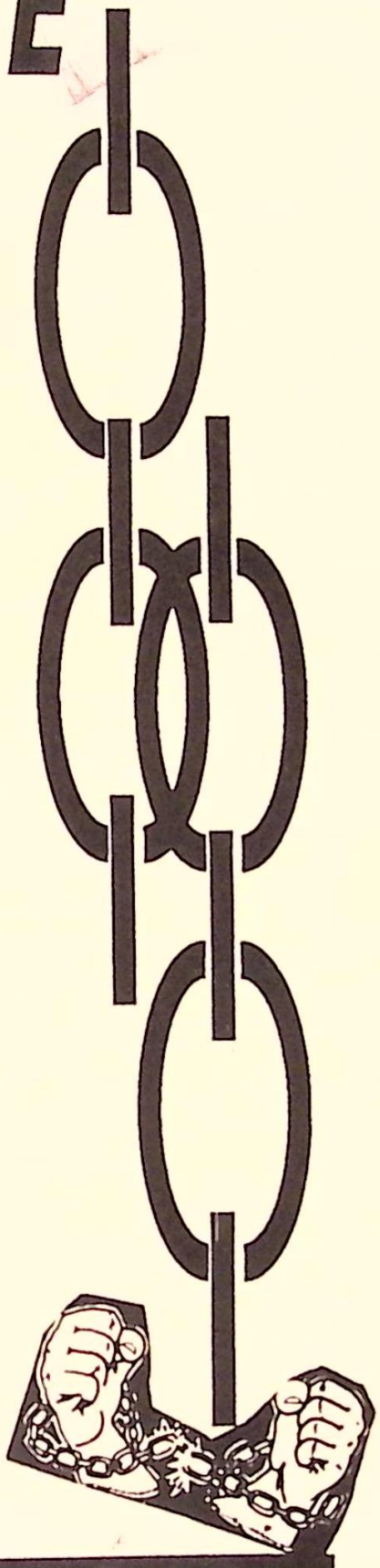
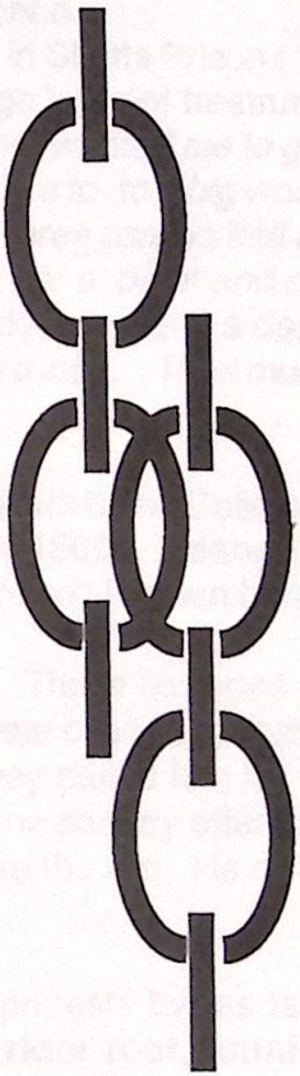
T/SOR/49/2/3

CHAINS OF *HATE*



The Prison Poetry of Sammy Ralston

CHAINS OF *HATE*



The prison poetry of Sammy Ralston

INTRODUCTION

REGULAR VIEWERS of that cult-followed media high-spot *Have I Got News For You* may well recall one of our poet's recent coups. A still of him holding a rabbit appeared on the haunted screen. Paul Merton explained that this was a news story about a Scottish prisoner whose pet rabbit had been kidnapped by other cons and was being held for a hefty ransom of two tins of ginger beer. Correct, said host Angus Deaton, and the prisoner, one Sammy Ralston, was now threatening open and bloody warfare unless the bunnynappers relented.

How ironic and sad that even the surrealist Merton and near-anarchic Deaton missed the point completely. Those of us who know Sammy threw back our heads and guffawed. They and the media in general had just been Ralstoned.

A while back as we wandered about the yard of the Special Unit in Shotts Prison ("a propaganda showpiece" my guide explained) I pointed to a large lump of treetrunk standing proud. What's that?. *"Well"*, said Sammy, *"the Governor wanted me to get into art, as a therapy, you know? So I said to him, okay then, I'd like to do a big wood sculpture. Cost them two-hundred quid for that tree trunk. Took three screws half an hour to drag it through the jail and stand it up. So I grabbed a pot o' paint and did* ***that.....*** *"* He gestures toward the trunk-top where two daubed dot eyes and a dash mouth grimace. *"Then I turned to the Governor and said, Thanks a lot..... I feel much better now".*

The English legal system has lately taken a hiding. The Birmingham 6, the Guildford 4, the Tottenham 3..... well, let's save time and just say the England 5000. Meanwhile the Scottish judiciary sits on its collective arse and smirks " It doesn't happen here". ***Doesn't it?***

It took Glasgow CID four attempts to stitch up Sammy Ralston. Thrice he rotted on remand on phoney charges, thrice he was acquitted by jury. A year of a young man's life stolen without apology or recompense. The fourth time they nailed him for an attempted security van robbery. The CID knew it wasn't Sammy so they offered a deal. Tell us who it was and you walk; don't tell us and you take the rap. He didn't know, and even if he did he wouldn't have said.

Barlinnie Prison, Armistice Day, 1986; a relalcitrant Ralston protests by, as later described by a sheriff, **"climbing up a drainpipe onto a corridor roof, running along the roof and overcoming barbed-wire, passing across a cell window and climbing the main rone pipe, which was greased, negotiating the main roof overhang and getting on to the roof of the prison to the cheers of prisoners in the excerise yard.....and remaining on the roof protesting his innocence and against the prison conditions from about 10.30a.m. to the early hours of the following morning".** Note that this was while he was still on remand.

Came the "trial". The old, old story. Iffy evidence, (one of the security guards was sure the attacker was Sammy, except that now his face was much thinner; another wasn't positive but said that the attacker had the same-shaped face as the accused)

perjuring pigs (what did happen to that strange disappearing note, Inspector?), nobbled witnesses, his mother called a liar by the Crown in court. Samuel Paul Ralston went down, hard. Seven years. W. Midlands Serious Crime Squad or Easterhouse CID, it's all the same. The pigs touched trotters and grunted gleefully. Sammy raised a clenched fist inside his soul and vowed ***No Surrender.***

Resistance. Beaten senseless by steeltoed Barlinnie screwboots and flung unconscious into a cell. The cover photo was taken by his lawyer. Other photos we saw showed the cell where he came-to, its slammed steel door scrawled with a defiant ***Sammy was Framed.*** Scrawled in what? In his own leaking blood; there was nothing else to scrawl with.
Peterhead. Scotland's Siberia, gulag for the "hard-cases" and "subversives". Sammy arrived in time for the Siege of '87; one of the rooftop banners proclaimed **" WHY HAVE BARLINNIE THUGS IN UNIFORM NOT BEEN CHARGED WITH THE TORTURE OF SAMMY RALSTON?".** The siege was broken by the psychopaths of the SAS. Heads smashed. Another seven years added for fighting back against brutality and torture, and injustice.
And now a man serves fourteen years and is nicknamed Sammy the Bear.

Sammy Ralston has fought back with every weapon available; five times "on the roof" - including a solo No poll Tax demo - riot, hungerstrike, dirty protest (smeared in faecal screw-repellant), letters to the press..... and even through the courts. "The Court of Appeal is a farce" he states, and having read some his appeal documents we totally agree. But in 1989 he sued the then Scottish Secretary, Malcolm "Rambo" Rifkind. Ralston v. Torture and Murder in Scotland's Control Units. He lost the suit. He had to. The State would never admit to **that**. But the same institutionalised brutality was widely publicised.
Sammy has suffered for his resistance. Beatings and torture, both physical and mental; three-and-a-half years out of his first six were spent in punitive isolation. *"I've spent time in the body belt and in the silent-cells in Barlinnie, Peterhead, Aberdeen and in the human zoo of the Inverness cages..... three-and-a-half years locked up behind a door, alone, for twenty-three hours a say. A lot of the time it was twenty-four..... who wants to excersise in a body belt?"*(See the illustrations accompanying Torturers; these were drawn from experience by Mick McCallum, another long-term Scottish prisoner).
Still Sammy fights on.
One last word. No doubt there will be those of the literati who will exclaim over their nursed flat pints of real ale, But is it poetry?.....the scansion, the metre.....rather jingly, what?
Of ***course*** it's poetry. It's the poetry of resistance, it's the poetry of the ungovernable spirit of revolt, the poetry of the unbroken will to fight on, against whatever odds, for what is decent and just, and for a better world for us all to live in.
Here's tae ye Sammy.

RANDOM FACTOR, EDINBURGH, JANUARY 1993

TORTURERS

The dungeon door slams shut again
And echoes all around
The four bare walls of granite
And the filthy concrete ground.

The prisoner lying on the floor
Screams his rage and pain
At the body belt around his waist.
His screaming is in vain.

For many hours he lies alone
Upon the concrete floor,
Naked, cold and full of hate,
Banging on the door.

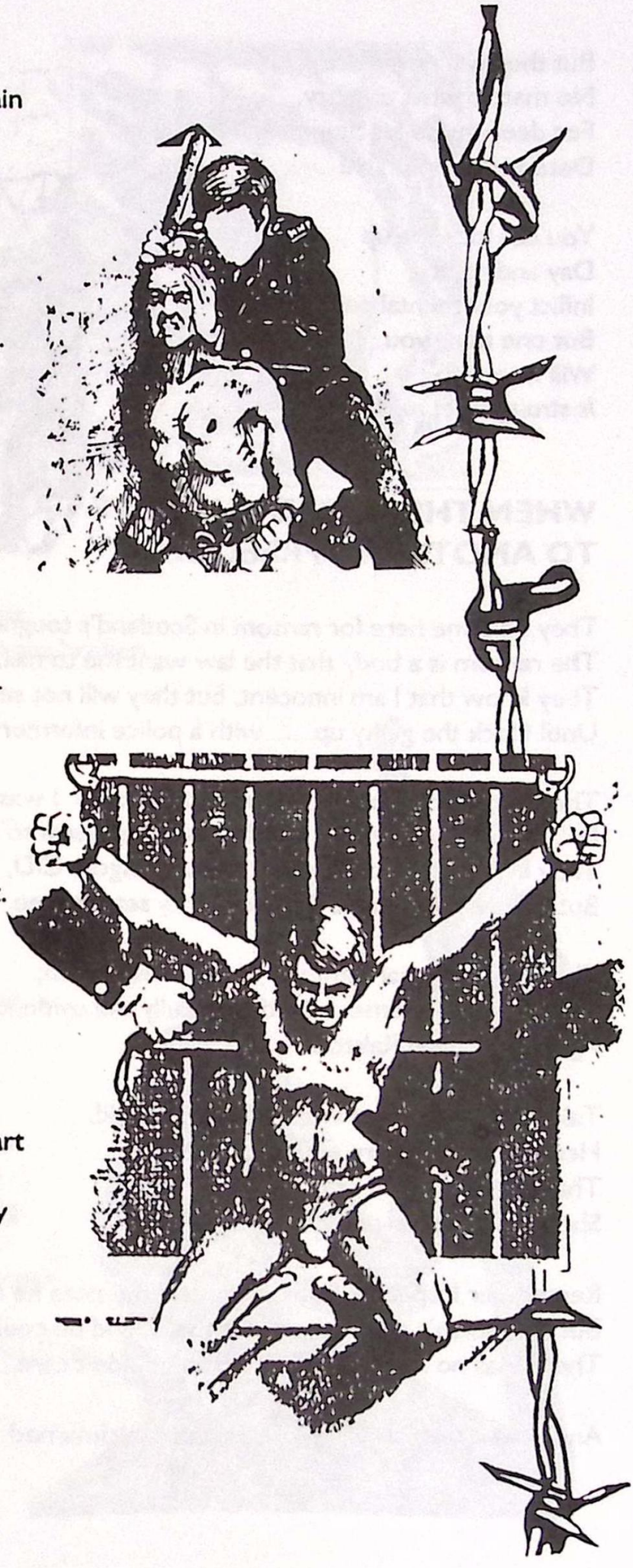
His body's bruised and battered
But still he won't concede
To the animals who torture him -
The guards of Peterheid.

For many years he's lived inside
Their factory of hate,
And had to suffer every day
From these guards' inhuman trait.

Tormented, baited, brutalised,
Victimised each day,
Living in conditions
Of vile inhumanity.

There's anger deep inside his heart
And there's hatred deep inside
At the brutal men who constantly
Attempt to smash his pride.

Who try to smash his dignity
And break his spirit too,
Humiliate him every day
He slowly passes through.



But they will never break him
No matter what they try,
For deep inside his thumping heart
Determination's high!

You can lock me up
Day and night
Inflict your mental pain
But one thing you
Will never do
Is strait-jacket my brain.

WHEN THEY HOLD THE KEYS TO ANOTHER'S FREEDOM

They hold me here for ransom in Scotland's toughest jail,
The ransom is a body that the law want me to nail.
They know that I am innocent, but they will not set me free,
Until I lock the guilty up..... with a police informer's key.

They know I cannot give a name, they *know* I wasn't there,
Police verbals convicted me, but no-one seems to care.
They know about corruption in the Glasgow CID,
But still they want a body before they set me free.

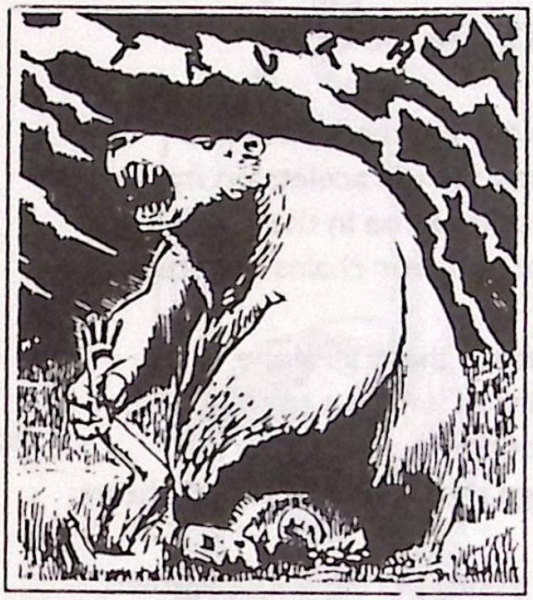
The PF at my trial summed up his prosecution;
'Ladies and gentlemen. Study carefully the evidence
Against this man Ralston.

Take the evidence of what his mother said.
Her son wasn't there. He was ill in bed.
That alibi is as good as none,
She's only lying to protect her son.'

Remember Inspector Robertson, and the note he found on his desk?
But he couldn't mind who put it there, and he could not care less.
There was no note, but Robertson couldn't care...

And now a man serves 14 years and is nicknamed ..... *Sammy the Bear.*

STILL I RISE



You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

THE ROOF HOPPERS

Are they on the roof in anger,
Surely they know the cost,
But how can they feel threatened
By what they've already lost?

Frustration born of anger
With themselves and what they've lost.
While the State counts the slates that are broken,
And tallies up the cost.

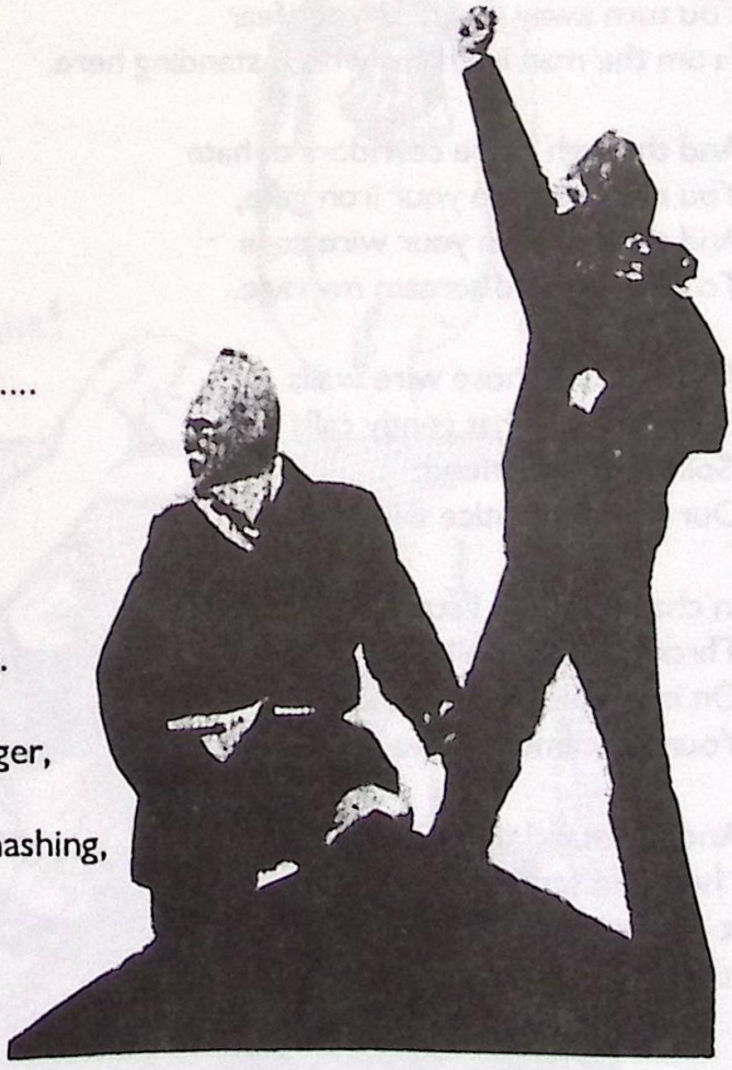
What is the real cost of anger?
Commonsense lost in one act,
And why should the whole population
Feel that it's under attack?

They only want to be noticed -
Look at me... I'm alive.... I exist
I don't want the hand that you dealt me....
Please can I have a twist?

It's a cry that says ... I'm frustrated,
The years that you gave are too long.
So I'm up here tugging and smashing
At a system that's got things all wrong.

I'll come down when I'm rid of my anger,
Down to your punishment cell,
But the hours I have spent up here smashing,
Released me from your fucking hell.

When injustice becomes law,
Resistance becomes duty!



CHAINS OF HATE

My hands are tightened into fists
As you snap your bracelets on my wrists.
You cannot look me in the face
When you put your chains of hate in place.

And as I stand there all alone
Your chains of hate cut to the bone,
My self control is ripped apart,
By the rage that's deep inside my heart.

And with your visored helmets down
You force me to your filthy ground,
And start to search me bodily
As your detector bleeps away.

And as I struggle to my feet
My eyes not one of you can meet,
You turn away and hide your fear
From the man in chains who is standing here.

And through these corridors of hate
You march me to your iron gate,
And throw me in your wire cage
To exercise and scream my rage.

And as I kick those wire walls
I hear a voice that gently calls
'Solidarity' my friend;
Our fight for justice will not end.

In chains of hate I stand and stare
Through wire walls into the air.
On iron poles up in the sky
Your TV cameras always pry.

And as I stand there in the rain
I hear the screams of cons in pain.
It echoes through the bars of grime-
It's 3 o'clock and torture time.

I hear them coming back once more,
They're standing at their wire door.
And as I leave their excersize
They *still* can't look into my eyes.

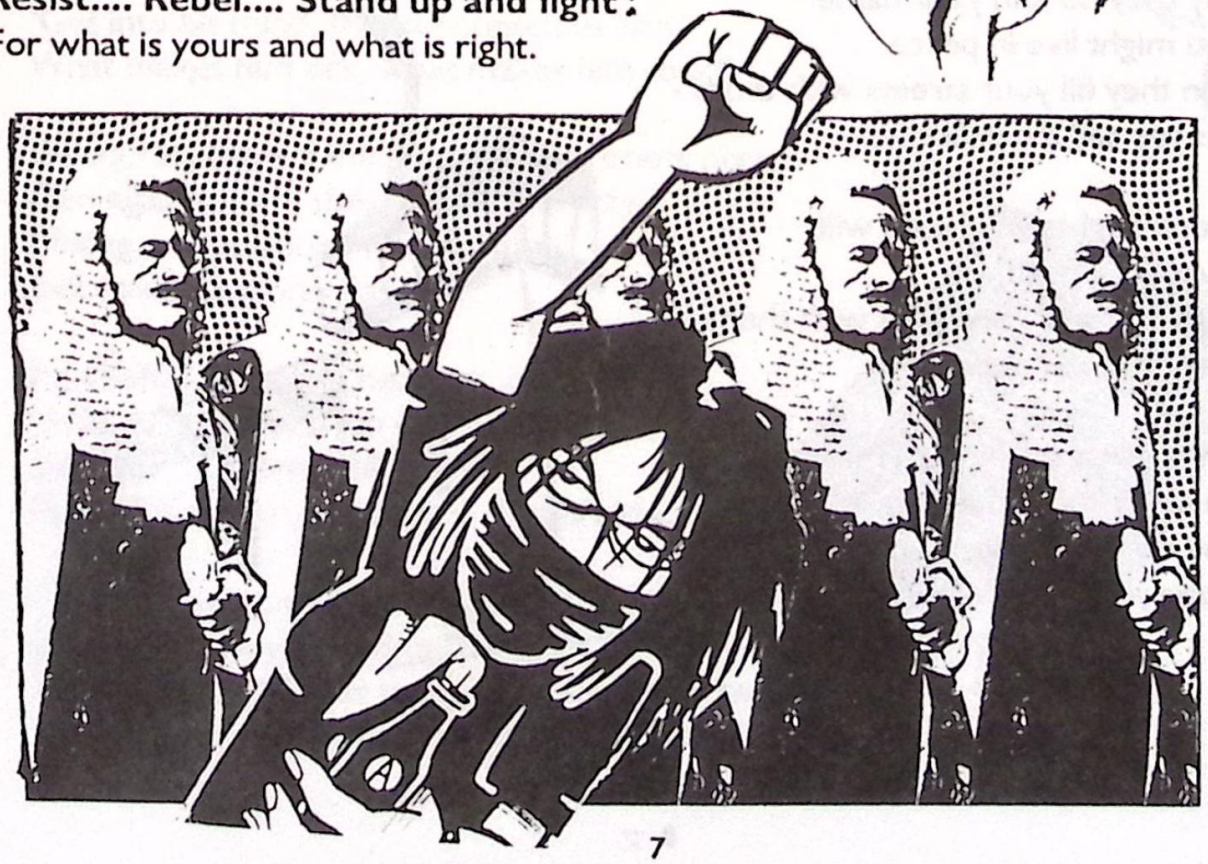
And as my rage burns like a flame
They turn away and hide their shame,
And cower in their riot gear;
Broken men in constant fear.

They know we're strong and they are weak,
That's why they always try to seek
Solutions to their troubled jail.
No matter what they do, they'll fail.

Through corridors of pain I stroll
Into their filthy dungeon hole,
In chains of hate I walk along
As fifty cons burst into song.

Our day will come I hear them say,
Brothers in arms they sing away.
No matter what you try to do
We'll fight and overcome your **ZOO**

In chains of hate I stand and yell
Outside my filthy dungeon cell -
Resist.... Rebel.... Stand up and fight!
For what is yours and what is right.



THEY'LL NEVER BREAK OUR MINDS

They chain our hands down by our sides
Our bodies to our beds,
They sometimes even chain our feet -
But they'll never chain our heads.

They break our limbs, both arms and legs,
They sometimes leave us blind.
They break their sticks across our heads -
But they'll never break our minds.

They throw their towels around our necks
And twist them oh so tight.
But though they do all this to us
We won't give up our fight.

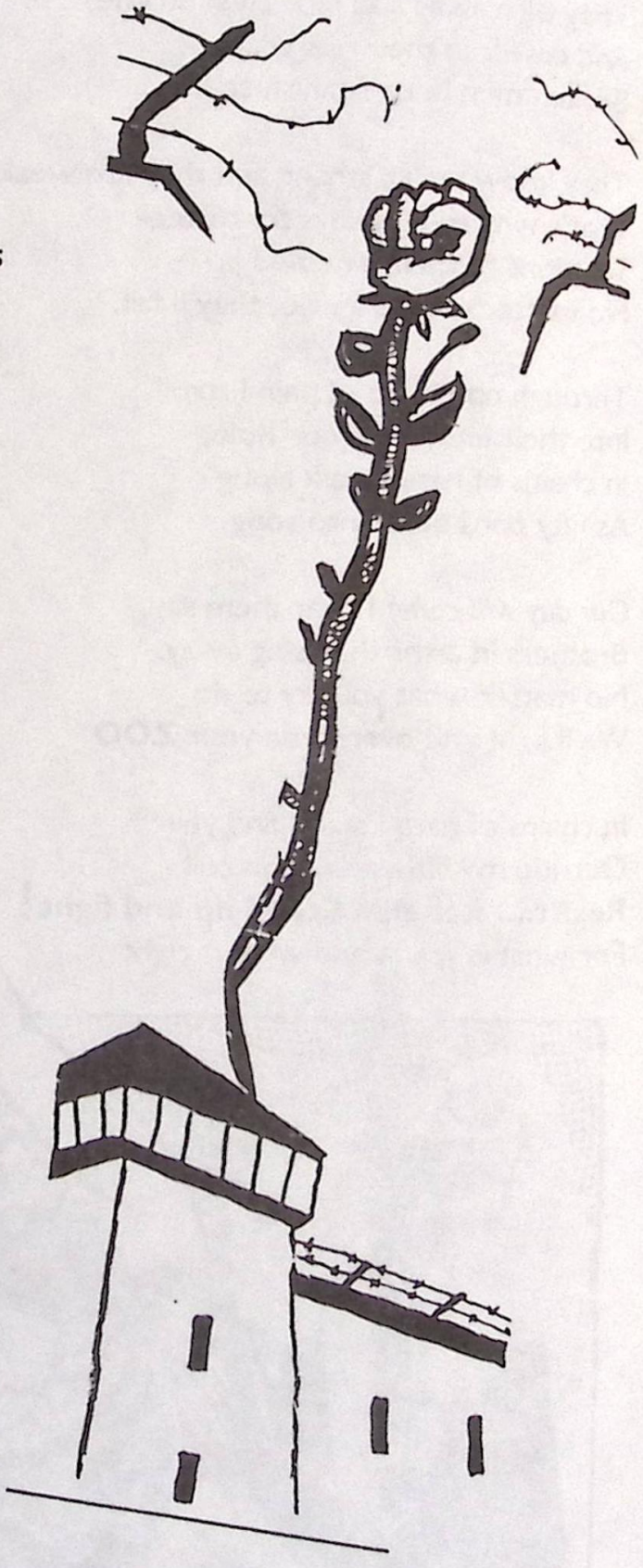
We scream for truth and justice
And they through us down their holes;
They call it law and order
Those fiends who have no souls.

Those nameless, faceless wonders,
The ones you never see,
Who build their factories of hate
For innocents like me.

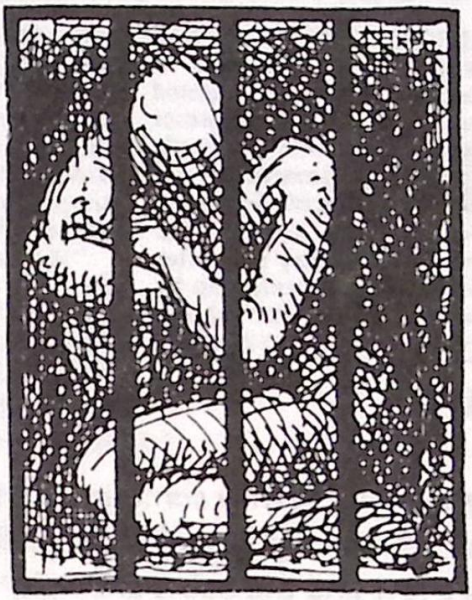
They say they do it in your name
That you might live in peace.
And then they fill your streets with thugs -
The ones you call the police.

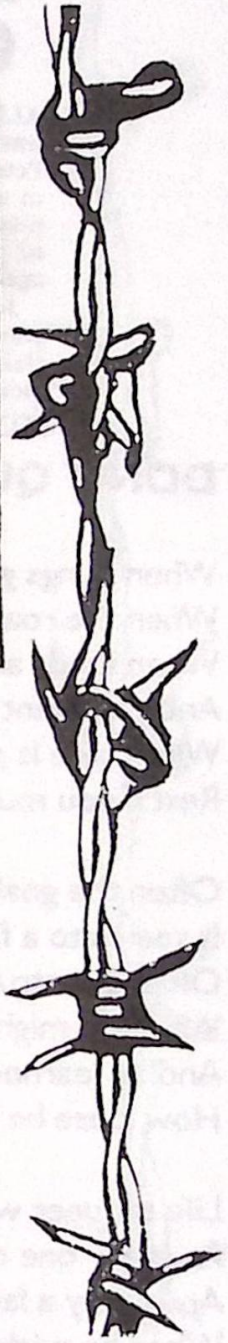
But though I fight and always will
You never lift a hand,
You laugh and smile and joke with them,
And sometimes join their band.

You fight against the likes of me
But you don't know the facts.
And how do they reward you sheep?
- They gave you the Poll Tax!



THE TRUTH





In concrete tombs we're chained alone
Upon our beds of granite stone.
Our wrists are bleeding from abuse
By the iron handcuffs that they use.

Our cells are bare from wall to wall,
No mattress, blankets, sheets at all,
No pillows for our weary heads;
Slabs of concrete as our beds.

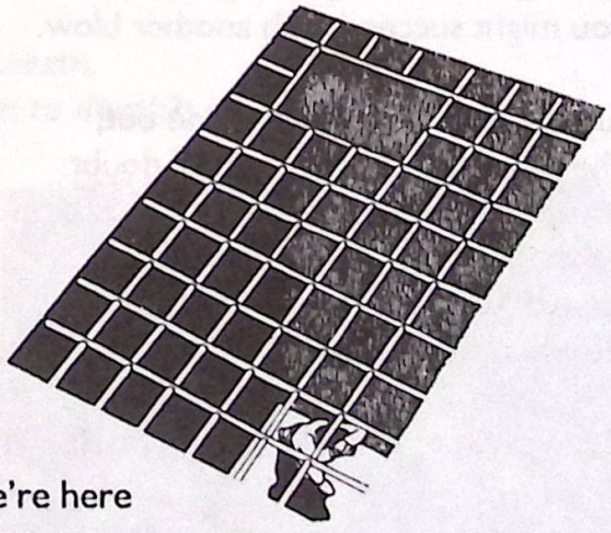
No clothes at all to keep us warm
From icy wind and bitter storm.
We shiver on our slabs of grime,
Chained and naked all the time.

No panes of glass in window frames-
'They're weapons against us', security claims,
So we suffer again in their chess game, as pawns.
No luxuries here for the B-Hall cons.

Then there's the drugs they feed us each day
[But not in a normal, positive way]
They're placed in the garbage we have to consume,
So we're sleeping all day in their concrete tomb.

And then the 'psychology' we have to face
Each day and each night in this hated place,
'Get into his mind, that subconscious box,
What makes him tick, what makes him tock?'

Of course, there's the games these robots play,
Con against con - they're safe that way.
Mixing and poisoned manipulation,
Evil cowards of instigation.



Psychology, torture, beatings, drugs,
Daily occurences from these thugs.
Snap his spirit, break his pride.
Fear of the truth which they always hide.

Psychological warfare; a jungle of pain,
But we will survive and uprise again.
They hate us and fear us and that's why we're here
Three hundred and sixty five daysof the year.

Convict sues over 'SAS attack'

ALLEGATIONS that the SAS was used to lift a siege at Peterhead jail are to be tested in a court case after a former prisoner there won his battle to start a damages action against the Scottish Secretary.

John Devine, 31, has been granted a civil jury trial after claiming he was beaten up by members of the Special Air Service during the 1987 siege.

case was due to be heard on 26 January at the Court of Session in Edinburgh.

Mr Fyfe said: "My client insists that he was not acting violently at the time and was simply caught up in the events at the jail.

"We will be fighting his case on the basis that he was attacked by members of the Special Air Service who were used to break the siege."

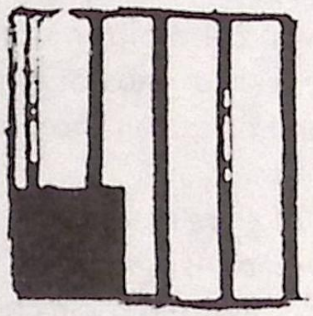
During the 1987 incident, he alleges, he suffered various injuries including cuts to the head. His lawyer first raised the case in 1989.

The Scottish Office said yesterday it could make no comment, because of the legal proceedings, on SAS involvement in ending the siege. —

The Scotsman

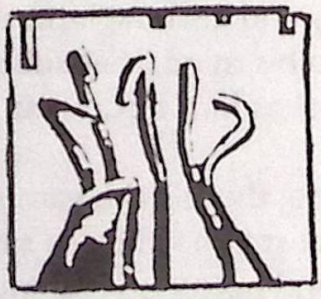
16 December 1992

DON'T QUIT



When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road your trudging seems all uphill,
When funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit.....
Rest if you must - but don't you quit.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man.
Often the struggler has given up
When he might have captured the victor's cup.
And he learned too late when the night slipped down
How close he was to the victor's crown.



Life is queer with its twists and turns
As every one of us often learns,
And many a failure turns about
When he might have won had he stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow -
You might succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt.
You never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar.
So stick to the fight when hardest hit -
It's when things seem worst that you musn't quit.

[Dedicated to the prisoners in Marion Federal Penitentiary, USA]

WHO GUARDS THE GUARDS?

Enquiries were held, everyone agreed
The prisoner was murdered - a terrible deed,
Three prison guards charged into his cell,
A vicious onslaughter, a defenceless man fell,
Kicked him and punched him, broke flesh and bone,
Left him there bleeding to die all alone.

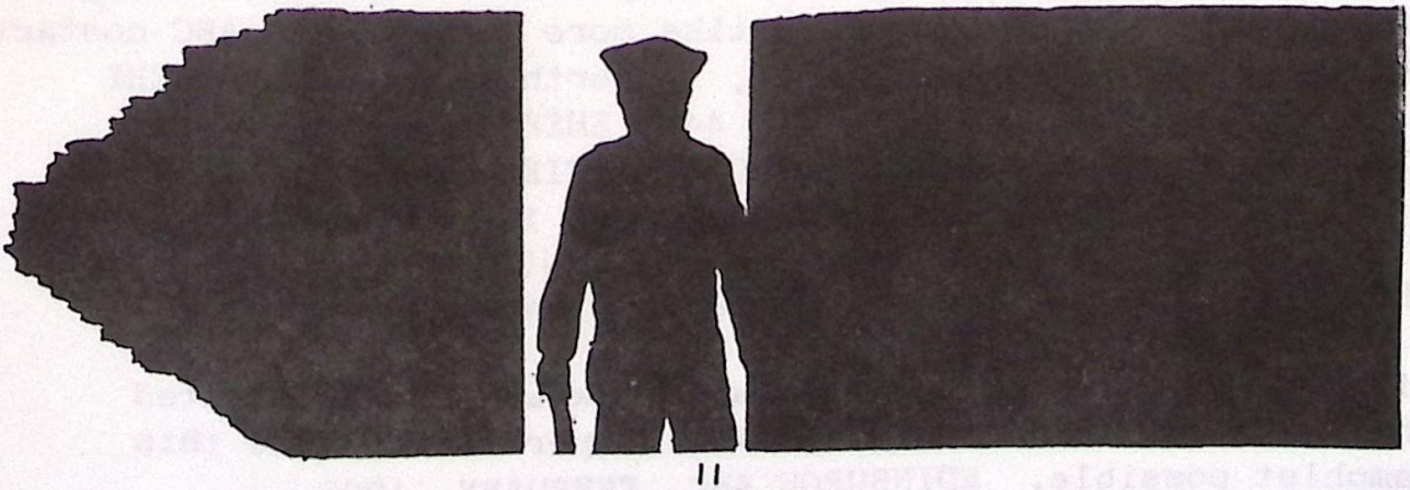
Who guards the guards? The question was cried.
Who guards the guards? But no-one replied.
Who guards the guards? His last dying breath.
Who guards the guards that beat him to death?

Court was assembled, culprits brought to book,
Statements were given, the oath it was took -
But killers went free - no retribution,
'Not Guilty' verdicts - a **legal** execution.
They say Justice is blind; that much is plain,
She would have wept to see what was done in Her name.

Who guards the guards? The question was cried.
Who guards the guards? But no-one replied.
Who guards the guards? His last dying breath.
Who guards the guards that beat him to death?

Hey Mister Screw! Help us to understand
How your conscience justifies blood on your hands.
Do you still sleep at night, do your kids fear your touch?
Can you look into your wife's eyes, does it bother you much
That a prisoner's been murdered and no-one's to blame..... ?
Just clean up his blood..... and score out his name.

Who guards the guards? His last dying breath.
Who guards the guards that beat him to death?



NOTES & RESOURCES

JAKE DEVINE lost his damages case against the Scottish Secretary. He received not a penny for his injuries, but on the other hand was emminently successful in forcing the State to officially admit that the SAS was used to break the Siege of Peterhead. Denied Legal Aid, his costs were initially paid by Jimmy Boyle. But suddenly and mysteriously, as Jake's counsel were trying to postpone the Hearing, Legal Aid was made available, and the case went ahead. Another Scottish prisoner, Stevie Windsor, who has fought long and hard through the Scottish courts to have his wrongful conviction for robbery overturned, equally mysterously had his Appeal suddenly cancelled. If Stevie wins his appeal he will be the first prisoner in Scotland to have such a conviction overturned. Others, like Paddy Meehan and Ernie Barry, have been pardoned; not the same thing at all. It doesn't happen here?
Sammy Ralston is being moved from the propaganda showpiece at Shotts. He is currently working on his prison memoirs and is fighting on. Any readers wishing to write to Sammy are advised to contact Edinburgh ABC for his current address. Any mail for him will be forwarded. Meanwhile, in Peterhead, Ricardo Blanco, a spanish national stitched-up by Glasgow CID is earning himself the title of 'the new Jimmy Boyle'. The struggle in Scotland's prisons continues unabated, despite the media's near blackout of information.

THE ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS
is an international support organisation, with active groups in Britain, Ireland, USA, Canada, France, Australia, Sweden, Finland and, most recently, the ex-USSR. The Black Cross is dedicated to helping revolutionary and class struggle prisoners: also those who have been wrongfully convicted, or jailed for unpalatable reasons, like those many women who are inside for killing brutally abusive partners. The ABC also supports prisoners who fight back, like Sammy Ralston and the Strange-ways Mutineers. If you would like more info on the ABC contact;
SCOTLAND. Edinburgh ABC, PHCI, 11 Forth St, EDINBURGH EH1
N. ENGLAND. Sheffield ABC, PO 446, SHEFFIELD, S. YORKS
(Publishes the excellent TAKING LIBERTIES newsletter)
S. ENGLAND. London ABC, 121 Bookshop, 121 Railton RD, LONDON
(Publishes the equally excellent ABC BULLETIN)
IRELAND. Derry ABC, co Organise, PO Box 5, DERRY BT48 6PD

Finally, many thanks to Steve and Mick who freely donated their time, interest and technical expertise to make this pamphlet possible. EDINBURGH ABC, FEBRUARY 1993

Legal wigs

Bar, Bench and Full Bottomed wigs from £259.00+ Vat

Made to measure in 100% horsehair and to the highest specification.
We offer a full maintenance, cleaning and repair service.

Cleaning from £12 +Vat
Black personalised wig boxes are also available

TURVEY
&CO LTD.

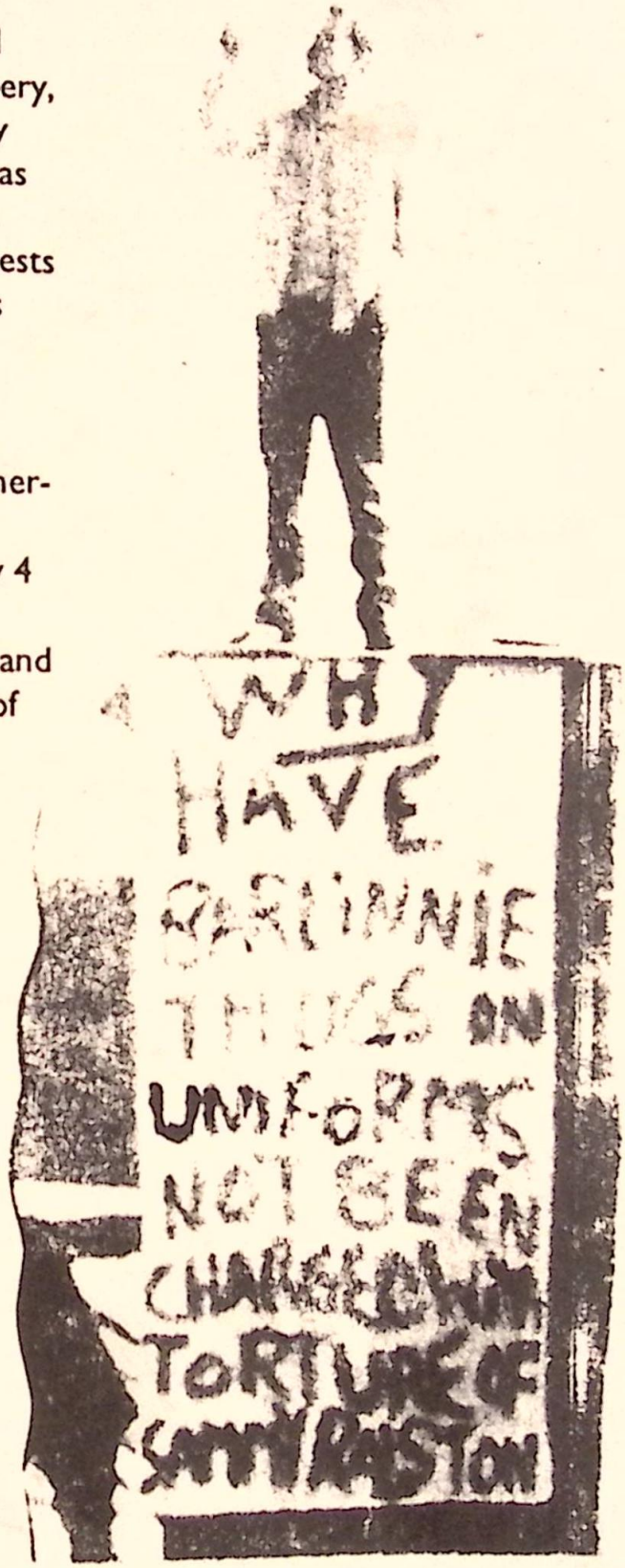
'Established 1918
14 Clasgow Road, Edinburgh, EH12 8HL **Tel: 031-334 0707**

RHYMES OF RESISTANCE FROM THE DEAD-END OF SCOTLAND'S PENAL SYSTEM

FITTED-UP by Glasgow CID in 1986 and sentenced to 7 years for attempted robbery, Sammy 'The Bear' Ralston has continually protested his innocence, a protest that has brought him into savage conflict with the prison authorities - and into further protests against the brutality of the prison officers and the systemised torture in Scotland's Control Units. Sammy had his sentence doubled for fighting back.
Five times 'on the roof', a veteran of numerous hungerstrikes, dirty protests and beatings, Sammy Ralston has spent nearly 4 of his first 6 years in prison in punitive isolation - in the 'silent cells' of Barlinnie and Aberdeen, the B-Hall punishment block of Peterhead and the notorious 'cages' in Inverness.

CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION
- TORTURERS
- WHEN THEY HOLD THE KEYS TO ANOTHER'S FREEDOM
- STILL I RISE
- THE ROOF HOPPERS
- CHAINS OF HATE
- THEY'LL NEVER BREAK OUR MINDS
- THE TRUTH
- DON'T QUIT
- WHO GUARDS THE GUARDS?



Peterhead Rooftop Protest 1987

PUBLISHED BY RANDOM FACTOR, EDINBURGH
DISTRIBUTED BY EDINBURGH ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS